

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY

S E C R E T STATE 223136

EXDIS DISTRIBUTE AS NODIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT NICOSIA 2678 ACTION SECSTATE 6 SEP 76

QUOTE S E C R E T NICOSIA 2678

NODIS

FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR LE

SUBJECT: STATUS OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS VIEWED FROM THE CHRISTIAN
SIDE

REF: STATE 215513

1. ON THE CHRISTIAN SIDE, THE PHALANGE AND SARKIS APPEAR
TO US THE LEADING PROPONENTS OF A CEASE FIRE TO ENABLE
PEACE SETTLEMENT EFFORTS TO BE UNDERTAKEN IN A MORE PROPITIOUS
ATMOSPHERE THAN PERTAINS NOW. THEY ARE NOT FOR PEACE
AT ALL COSTS BUT GIVEN THE HUMAN AND OTHER COST OF THE
FIGHTING, THE LIKELY ACCRETION OF THE PALESTINIAN FORCE
AND ITS EQUIPMENT AND THEIR OWN BATTLE FATIGUE AND THAT OF
THE PALESTINIANS -- FOR ALL THESE REASONS THEY APPEAR

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CONVINCED THAT THEY MUST CONTINUE THEIR EFFORTS TO PROBE

THE OTHER SIDE FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO OBTAIN A CEASE FIRE. THEY ARE IN CONTACT ON A CONTINUING BASIS NOT ONLY WITH THE PALESTINIANS BUT ALSO WITH THE MOSLEM SUNNITES, PARTICULARLY SAEB SALAAM. THE PHALANGE STRATEGY SEEMS TO HAVE CARRIED THE DAY IN THE CHRISTIAN FRONT AS NO ONE SEEMS TO BE OPENLY SOPPOSING SUCH EFFORTS, ALTHOUGH THE ENTHUSIASM OF THE CHAMOUNISTS AND THE TANZIIM (FUAD SHEMALI) FOR THE STRATEGY SEEMS VERY MUCH UNDER CONTROL. AS FOR FRANGIEH, WE QUESTION WHETHER THE PHALANGE FEELS THE NEED FOR HIS APPROVAL.

2. THE CHAMOUNISTS WANT PEACE BUT, FROM OUR CONVERSATIONS, ARE CONVINCED THAT THE CHANCES ARE SLIM UNTIL THE OTHER SIDE HAS BEEN BATTERED ABOUT A BIT MORE. THERE APPEARS NO IMMEDIACY TO THE PROBLEM IN THEIR EYES. THE PALESTINIANS HAVE WELSHED ON MYRIADS OF PREVIOUS AGREEMENTS. WHY SHOULD THEY ACCEPT ONE NOW?

3. THE CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS SEEM TO BE IN TWO PARTS -- THE ARAB LEAGUE EFFORT AND THE PHALANGE-PALESTINIAN TALKS. BOTH HAVE THE OBJECTIVE OF A CEASE FIRE AND WITHDRAWALS -- THE MARONITES, HOWEVER, HAVE LITTLE TRUST IN OR RESPECT FOR THE ARAB LEAGUE. CONSEQUENTLY THEY DO NOT APPEAR IN PRIVATE TO TAKE SERIOUSLY MR KHOLY'S EFFORTS, WHICH GHASSAN TWEINI DESCRIBES AS A COVER FOR THE PHALANGE-PALESTINIAN TALKS.

4. THESE TALKS ARE BEING NEGOTIATED BETWEEN ABU HASSAN FOR THE PALESTINIANS AND BESHIR AND AMIN GEMAYEL FOR THE PHALANGE. BOTH GHASSAN TWEINI AND SAEB SALAM SEEM INVOLVED AS MEDIATORS. ACCORDING TO AMIN GEMAYEL, AN AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED BY YASSER ARAFAT AND WAS TO BEGIN COMING INTO EFFECT ON SEPTEMBER 1. WE WERE SHOWN AN ALLEGED COPY OF THE ARABIC TEXT (THE ORIGINAL IS HELD BY SAEB SALAM) WHICH PROVIDED, INTER ALIA, FOR:

(A) THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE PALESTINIANS FROM THE MOUNTAINS OF THE METN.

(B) ARAB LEAGUE OBSERVERS TO OVERSEE THE WITHDRAWAL.
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(C) A SEASE FIRE.

(D) OBSERVERS TO SUPERVISE "THE CORDON SANITAIRE" BETWEEN BEIRUT AND THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE AT BAABDA. NEEDLESS TO SAY THIS HAS NOT GONE INTO EFFECT, ALTHOUGH ACCORDING TO BOTH SARKIS AND PIERRE GAMALEY PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE AND THESE TALKS HAVE BEEN MORE SERIOUS THAN

OTHERS. IT IS NOT QUITE CLEAR WHAT IS GOING ON EXCEPT, AS NOTED BY A JOURNALIST FRIEND, THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY UNDERWAY " AND THAT ALWAYS REDUCES THE INTENSITY OF MILITARY ACTIVITY."

5. GEMAYAL, IN SHOWING US THE COPY OF THE AGREEMENT SIGNED BY ARAFAT, NOTED THAT THE FAILURE OF THE PALESTINIANS TO IMPLEMENT THE AGREEMENT WAS PAR FOR THE COURSE. HE DID NOT HAVE ANY READY EXPLANATION FOR THE PALESTINIAN BEHAVIOR OTHER THAN THAT THEY WERE BEING PRESSURED BY THE SOVIETS NOT TO GIVE IN. WHY THEY BOTHERED TO AGREE IN THE FIRST PLACE WAS NOT CLEAR. WE ARE, OF COURSE, IN NO POSITION TO JUDGE THE DEGREE OF RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PHALANGE ITSELF FOR THE FAILURE NOR DO WE KNOW THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE HARD-LINE DEMANDS OF FRANGIEH AND CHAMOUN MAY HAVE RETARDED THE PROGRESS OF NEGOTIATIONS.

6. MICHEL KHOURY BELIEVES THAT PART OF THE PROBLEM IS THAT ABU HASSAN WHO DOES MOST OF THE PALESTINIAN NEGOTIATING, HAS NO FOLLOWING WITHIN THE PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT. HIS ONLY STRENGTH LIES IN HIS ABILITY TO INFLUENCE ARAFAT. AS A RESULT SARKIS AND OTHERS ARE ENDEAVORING TO SWITCH TO SOMEONE LIKE ABU AYYAD, WHO, IF HE AGREES TO SOMETHING, HAS SOME CHANCE OF CARRYING THE DAY WITH OTHERS WITHIN THE MOVEMENT.

7. WHETHER THERE WILL BE A CEASE FIRE AGREEMENT REMAINS TO BE SEEN. WITH DESIRE OF MANY TO DO EVERYTHING TO ENHANCE THE PROSPECTS OF SARKIS ASSUMING OFFICE UNDER THE BEST POSSIBLE CONDITIONS AND THE WAR WEARINESS OF BOTH SIDES, THERE WOULD APPEAR CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE AND CERTAINLY COMPARABLE ACTIVITY TO ACHIEVE SOME TYPE OF CEASE FIRE BEFORE SEPTEMBER 23. EVEN FOR THE PHALANGE,
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HOWEVER, PALESTINIAN WITHDRAWAL FROM THE METN APPEARS TO BE AN IRREDUCIBLE MINIMUM CONCESSION FOR ANYTHING MORE THAN LOCALIZED CASE FIRES.
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